



The Hanan Maternal and Child Health Project Cries of Life: The Story of the Beit-Hanoon Clinic

In the northern Gaza Strip, the Beit-Hanoon clinic is where mothers bring their newborn babies for care and medical advice. Until recently, it was challenging for women to take advantage of services to check and monitor their children's health. Typically, mothers receive postnatal care from a midwife in one place then must visit another building to check their children's health. They return to the first location for their babies to receive a vaccination that prevents tuberculosis.

"This back-and-forth process is uncomfortable for mothers and infants, especially during the winter when they have to go out in the cold," says Ahlam el-Hweehi, 36, a midwife at Beit-Hanoon

Clinic, one of the 63 clinic partners supported by USAID's Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) project, called Hanan. The three-year initiative aims to improve the health of vulnerable Palestinian women of reproductive age and children under the age of five. One critical element of Hanan is training doctors, nurses and midwives to provide high quality maternal and child health services and to promote positive household and community MCHN-related behaviors. JSI Research and Training Institute leads the project in partnership with ANERA, and Emerging Markets Group.

When learning about antenatal care, nutrition, and mother and child care through Hanan training courses, Ahlam and her colleague Haleema recognized the importance of providing care for women and children in one place. "In the modified clinic program, mothers and babies receive treatment in one room while the doctor comes to them," Haleema says. "Mothers who need postnatal care avoid risking their children's health in the cold."

In addition to learning about the importance of providing care in one place, Ahlam admits that when she started working at the clinic three years ago, she did not have up-to-date health and nutritional information to help young mothers and their babies. Training through the Hanan project taught her a lot.

"When I arrived, I didn't know mothers should feed babies with their natural milk until 6 months after the child's birth." She turns to advise Fedaa, a postnatal mother who holds her week-old newborn, Amal. "I think I have become a better, more informed midwife.



Mothers and midwives like these benefit from Hanan-supported training about nutrition and well-baby practices at the Beit-Hanoon Clinic, one of 63 clinics supported by USAID.

Now when women come to me for counseling, I am glad I can pass along information I gathered during training.”

In conservative communities such as Beit-Hanoon, where newly married couples usually live in their parents’ homes, mothers are encouraged to learn more about MCHN, especially those who are unfamiliar with ante-natal and postnatal care. Almost two thirds of women in the West Bank and Gaza receive no postnatal care at all.

“We discovered that the mothers-in-law of young women also benefit from effective postnatal counseling sessions,” says Ahlam. “Once they understand the benefits, they encourage their daughters to visit the clinic. This way, we reach more women.”

Clinics like the one at Beit-Hanoon are managed by UNRWA, the UN agency that provides Palestinian refugees and their families with free-of-charge medical and other services. Hanan-trained practitioners in this and other UNRWA clinics offer improved services reflecting international and national protocols and guidelines. They work to ensure that mothers’ health and nutritional practices offer the most benefit to them and their children.

"We're thankful for the training that Hanan provided," says Ahlam. "We enjoy listening to the cries of newborn babies, especially because now they are healthy cries. They are cries of life."